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THE MIRACLE OF MUHAMMAD

PRECEDED BY AN OUTLINE OF
MUHAMMAD'S LIFE

BY

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INTRODUCTORY.

Gentle Reader,

While laying before you the lecture which, under the title "The Miracle of Muḥammad", I delivered last year in London at the celebration of that great Prophet's birthday, I hope you will allow me to give you a brief account of his life.

Muḥammad is one of those illustrious figures in history whose personality has withstood the obliterating influences of time; whilst, on the other hand, it has been saved from the super-humanism which credulous man attributes to his past heroes.

We can almost see the man — healthy and sound, of medium height, with broad shoulders, piercing eyes and handsome features — walking humbly in the streets of Mecca, instinctively loved by innocent children, and honoured and respected by his countrymen, who surnamed him al-Amīn, The Trusty.

The same man, a little ripened in age, may be seen again, on the top of Mount Hīrā', disgusted with the moral and religious degradation of his people. His soul soars aloft to that Being Who, as a Muslim poet beautifully says, cannot long remain hidden from pure hearts:

.... "But Beauty cannot brook concealment
 And the veil, nor patient rest
 Unseen and unadmired, but bursts all bonds,
 And from its prison casement to the world
 Reveals Itself. See where the tulip grows in upland
 Meadows: how in balmy spring
 It decks itself, and how amidst its thorns the
 Wild rose rends its garments, and displays
 Its loveliness. And then, when some rare thought,
 Or beauteous image, or deep mystery,
 Flashes across thy soul, canst not endure to let it pass,
 But hold'st it, that perchance
 In speech or writing thou mayst send it forth
 To charm the world. Wherever Beauty dwells
 Such is Its nature, and Its heritage from everlasting.
 Beauty, which emerged ✓
 From realms of purity to shine upon the worlds, and
 All the souls that dwell therein.
 One gleam fell from It on the Universe and on the
 Angels, and this single Ray
 Dazzled the Angels, till their senses whirled like
 The revolving sky. In diverse forms
 Each mirror showed It forth, and everywhere Its
 Praise was chanted in new melodies.
 The Cherubim enraptured, sought for songs of praise:
 The Spirits who explore the depths
 Of boundless seas, wherein the heavens swim like some
 Small boat, cried with one mighty voice:
Praise to the Lord of all the Universe! ✓

solitary

The recluse in the cave of Hirā' has become
 conscious of the existence of the All-Merciful and
 of the pitiable condition of his countrymen, and
 we see him, moved by the noblest feelings of which
 man is capable, proclaim the Unity of God, impart
 the doctrine of salvation and make strenuous efforts
 to educate his fellow-citizens and to rescue his

country from the dominion of sin and error. At this period of his career he has been described by Gibbon, as follows:

"Before he spoke, the orator engaged on his side the affections of a public or a private audience. They applauded his commanding presence, his majestic aspect, his piercing eye, his gracious smile, his flowing beard, his countenance that painted every sensation of the soul, and his gesture that enforced each expression of the tongue. In the familiar offices of life he scrupulously adhered to the grave and ceremonious politeness of his country: his respectful attention to the rich and powerful was dignified by his condescension and affability to the poorest citizens of Mecca . . . His memory was capacious and retentive, his wit easy and social, his imagination sublime, his judgment clear, rapid and decisive. He possessed the courage both of thought and action . . . and the first idea which he entertained of his Divine mission bears the stamp of an original and superior genius."

But all at once we see this man, hitherto so respected and honoured by his countrymen, persecuted, reviled, exiled and even threatened with death. Because his conscience bade him free himself from the gross immoralities and sins then rampant, because he had the courage to make his convictions known, the benevolence to undertake the direction of his people into the right way, and because he felt that he was commissioned to call mankind towards one God, the Merciful, the Wise, the Just, the Forgiving, the Almighty and the Omnipresent — because of these things his fellow-townsmen,

who had once loved him, now took a dislike to him which soon turned into hatred.

A fresh change comes after a time. Truth conquers falsehood, righteousness overcomes sin, and we see the same man, still indefatigable, despite advancing years, in the fulfilment of his mission revered more profoundly by his compatriots than were the great monarchs of Persia and Rome by their subjects, beloved by his followers above their own parents and children, wielding supreme temporal and spiritual power over the Peninsula, leading hosts of men along the path of righteousness, conquest and civilisation. Mr. Stanley Lane-Poole writes of him:

“There is something so tender and womanly, and withal so heroic about the man, that one is in peril of finding the judgment unconsciously blinded by the feeling of reverence and well-nigh love that such a nature inspires. He who, standing alone, braved for years the hatred of his people, is the same who was never the first to withdraw his hand from another’s clasp; the beloved of children, who never passed a group of little ones without a smile from his wonderful eyes and a kind word for them, sounding all the kinder in the sweet-toned voice. The frank friendship, the noble generosity, the dauntless courage and hope of the man, all tend to melt criticism in admiration. He was an enthusiast, in that noblest sense when enthusiasm becomes the salt of the earth, the one thing that keeps men from rotting whilst they live.... He was an enthusiast when enthusiasm was the one thing needed to set the world aflame,

“and his enthusiasm was noble, for a noble cause. He was one of those happy few who have attained the supreme joy of making one great truth their life-spring. He was the Messenger of the One God; and never, to his life’s end, did he forget who he was, or the message which was the marrow of his being.”

The poor shepherd, the recluse of Hirā’, is now the author of a mighty revolution, the conqueror of Arabia, the “minister of life”, the source, under God, of the hopes of a whole peninsula.

Still, writes Gibbon, “the good sense of Mahomet despised the pomp of royalty; the apostle of God submitted to the menial offices of the family; he kindled the fire, swept the floor, milked the ewes and mended with his own hand his shoes and his woollen garments. Disdaining the penance and merit of an hermit, he observed, without effort or vanity, the abstemious diet of an Arab and a soldier. On solemn occasions he feasted his companions with rustic and hospitable plenty; but, in his domestic life, many weeks would elapse without a fire being kindled on the hearth of the Prophet.”

Muhammad, the son of ‘Abdallah and Aminah, of the noble family of Kuraysh, was born at Mecca in the year 570 of the Christian era, a few months after his father’s death. It is said that his mother had learned in a dream the name to be given the child, and that this was the reason why ‘Abd-al-Muttalib called his orphan grandson Muhammad — the Praised. Grief having dried up the widow’s

breasts, the infant, according to custom, was handed over to a foster-mother — Halimah, a woman of the Banī Sa'd family; and for this nurse Muḥammad, when he had grown to be the spiritual and temporal monarch of Arabia, entertained the greatest gratitude and affection, which he extended to her offspring. After five years the child was restored to his mother, but had the misfortune to lose her when he was but six, and the care of the orphan devolved first upon his aged grandfather, and two years later, when 'Abd-al-Muṭṭalib also died, upon Abū Tālib, Muḥammad's uncle and the father of 'Alī. The Prophet thus had but little experience of parental love; yet in after life he always urged his followers to the greatest filial piety, reminding them, with one of his happy expressions, that "Paradise lies at the feet of mothers." Muḥammad, who grew up very strong and healthy, is said to have taken no interest, even as a child, in frivolous pursuits, telling his companions, on one occasion, that man was made for a higher object. He soon won the love and admiration of his fellow-townsmen, who, as has been said, named him the Trusty. At the age of twelve he had accompanied his uncle to Syria, and in his twenty-fifth year he was given charge of the goods sent to Damascus by Khadijah, daughter of Khuwaylid, of the house of Kuraysh; a lady fifteen years the senior of the Prophet. He showed great aptitude for business, and brought back large sums to Khadijah, whose appreciation of his ability and personal charm led to their marriage. Her love grew day by day as she became better acquainted with his sterling

qualities, while he was no less fondly attached to her. As her husband he was less successful in the management of her interests than he had been as her agent, but this did not in the least diminish the harmony between them.

When thirty-five he saved his country from a bloody war, which was on the point of arising out of the fixture of the sacred Black Stone; but with this exception his life, though spent usefully, did not bring him into prominence. It was not until his fortieth year that he began that public career which has left its mark upon the history of the world. He was in the cave at Hirā', in the Month of Ramādan, when he received the command:

"Read! in the name of thy Lord, Who hath created [all things]; Who hath created man from a clot of blood. Read, for thy Lord is most generous, Who hath taught the use of the pen, and teacheth man what he knew not..."

The above is the first of the series of revelations that were made from time to time to the illiterate prophet, the first step towards preparing his spirit for the gigantic task which was to be allotted him. This, when the mandate of the Almighty came, he accepted with humble submission, and set himself heart and soul, with an iron will, to carry it out.

As charity begins at home, Muḥammad told his own family, before all others, of the light that had been vouchsafed him, with the result that those who first believed in his Mission were they that knew him best. I again let Gibbon speak for me.

"The first and most arduous conquests of Mahomet", he says, "were those of his wife, his servant, his

“pupil and his friends; since he presented himself “as a prophet to those who were most conversant “with his infirmities as a man. Yet Chadijah believed “the words, and cherished the glory, of her husband; the obsequious and affectionate Zaid was “tempted by the prospect of freedom” [what warrant had Gibbon for this insinuation of a base motive, especially in one whose previous and subsequent record show that he was not a man to be influenced by selfish considerations?], “the illustrious “Alī, the son of Abu Talib, embraced the sentiments “of his cousin with the spirit of a youthful hero; and “the wealth, the moderation, the veracity of Abubekr “confirmed the religion of the prophet whom he “was destined to succeed. By his persuasion, ten “of the most respectable citizens of Mecca were “introduced to the primitive lessons of Islam; they “yielded to the voice of reason and enthusiasm; “they repeated the fundamental creed, ‘There is “but one God, and Mahomet is the apostle of God’.”

Not once during the lifetime of Muḥammad or of these early believers did any shadow of doubt cross their mind as to the truth of what their great Teacher had told them, or as to his sincerity. The more they knew him, the more they believed in him.

Well may Ameer Ali argue, from such facts, that “If these men and women, noble, intelligent and “certainly not less educated than the fishermen of “Galilee, had perceived the slightest sign of earthliness, deception or want of faith in the teacher “himself, Muḥammad’s hopes of moral regeneration “and social reform would all have been dashed to “pieces in a moment.”

For the next few years Muḥammad was subjected to constant insults by his fellow-citizens, and his handful of followers was tortured and persecuted, so much so, indeed, that some of them had to fly to Abyssinia. Thus Bilāl, afterwards the first muezzin of the Muslims, was stripped naked by his master and laid upon the burning sand with a heavy load of stones over him, and commanded to recant if he wanted his sufferings put an end to, but so strong was the influence of his faith that “*Aḥadun, Aḥadun*” (One, One) was the only word heard to issue from his parched lips.

The enmity of the Meccans towards Muhammad increased as time went on. One hundred camels, with a large sum of money, were offered for his head by Abū Jahl, an implacable foe of Islam. ‘Omar, son of al-Khattāb, pledged himself to kill Muḥammad, and set out for the purpose, armed with a naked sword. On the way it was pointed out to him that he had better first look at home, where his own sister had become a convert. Betaking himself thither, he found her and her husband reading the *Kur-ān*. So furious was he that he threw his brother-in-law to the ground, and did not scruple to strike his sister when she interfered to save her husband’s life; but she, nothing daunted, owned that she had embraced Islām, and defied him to do his worst. ‘Omar, abashed, asked to be told what this new religion was, with the result that he was deeply affected by the words of the *Kur-ān*, went straight to Muḥammad to make his profession of faith, and became one of the bulwarks of Islam.

His conversion and that of another leading man and valiant soldier, Hamzah, showed the Kuraysh that matters were growing serious, and greatly added to their fury. Having failed in their endeavours to tempt Muḥammad, they now tried, under pain of exterminating him and his followers, to get him silenced by Abū Tālib. They were again unsuccessful, and the Prophet, in spite of their threats, went on denouncing idolatry and calling the people to the worship of one God, to righteousness and civilisation. The Kuraysh grew ever more enraged, and, as Abū Tālib had called upon the whole of the House of Hāshim to protect his nephew, they retaliated by putting the family under a ban until it should give up Muḥammad to be killed. Not only intermarriage, but all social and civil intercourse and even business communications were put a stop to, and the ostracised clan, in order to save itself from violence, had to withdraw to the Shi'b, where it endured all the privations of a beleaguered garrison. The children of these people were famishing, their business was at a standstill, their sufferings, in a word, were very great: yet they persevered in their friendship to Muḥammad, and he himself, whenever the holy months of truce afforded him an opportunity, would sally forth to propagate his faith among the pilgrims. The ordeal lasted three long years; but at last, in the tenth of Muḥammad's proclamation of his mission, the steadfastness of the clan had its reward, the excommunication coming to an end. About this time the prophet was bereft of his dearly beloved wife Khadijah and of his generous and powerful protector, Abū Tālib. The

death of the latter encouraged the enemies of the Prophet to redouble their persecutions, and he was forced to leave Mecca for Tā'if. But the Thakīfites were no less bitter against him than the Meccans, and he had ere long to quit their city, bruised and bleeding.

Muṭ'im, one of those who had obtained the removal of the ban against the Banī Hāshim, took pity on the wanderer and brought him to Mecca under his protection. The idolaters now adopted a new device for thwarting Muḥammad: they forbade all and sundry to listen to his teaching. A man named 'Abdullah determined, however, to make the Meccans hear the Kur-ān, so, placing himself in their midst, he cried its words aloud.

The Meccans attacked him, but he continued his recitation, in spite of the blows rained upon his face and body, until they threw him out of the holy place, exultant at having forced them to give him a hearing. Such acts, which showed how firm was the conviction of those who had embraced Islām, increased the spleen of the Kuraysh, and further fuel was added to the flame when Muḥammad, in the course of two successive pilgrimages, obtained the conversion of seventy-five Medinans, and when, as Mr. Gilman says, "the Jews even begged Mohammed to send them a teacher to give them instruction in the new faith that had worked "so remarkable a change in the community." A consultation was held and, after much discussion, it was resolved that each of the chief families should choose a representative, and that all of the latter should together plunge their swords into the

body of Muḥammad, dividing the guilt of his blood. Thus the Hāshimites, unable to exact vengeance from the whole city, must content themselves with pecuniary compensation, the burden of which, shared amongst all the families, could be borne with ease. But God did not allow Muḥammad, like some of the great prophets before him, to be cut off in the middle of his career: he escaped at night with his bosom friend Abū Bakr, and the conspirators found the person lying on the Prophet's bed, and covered, with his own green mantle, to be 'Alī, another of his most devoted followers. The fugitives had to hide for three days in a cavern, an incident thus alluded to by the Kur-ān: "God helped him already "when he was exiled by the unbelievers, when he "was one of two in the cave, and said to his companion 'Be not downcast! Verily God is with us.'" They were pursued, but the protection of Providence accompanied them and they reached Medina in safety. Such was the Hijrah, or Flight, from which the Muslim era dates.

At Medina a brotherhood was formed between the Muhājirīn, who had fled from Mecca, and the Anṣār, who gave shelter to the refugees: This tie, which was closer than that of blood relationship, laid the foundation of the wholesome democratic equality that exists in Islām between man and man. Muḥammad was now among friends, but his responsibilities had increased. He had to protect his fellow citizens, who had suffered such great trouble and lost so much for the faith, as well as the Medinans who, in giving them hospitality, laid themselves open to the attacks of its enemies; to

infuse a common national spirit into his divided countrymen, and make a reality of what Plato and Aristotle had attempted in theory; to complete the unfinished work of his predecessor, not only leading people to righteousness, but also giving a concrete form to the "Kingdom of Heaven" and teaching his followers that religion was not merely an abstract mysticism, fit for the ascetic alone, but something that brings with it happiness of mind and comfort of body, and is a guide to piety in this world and to its reward in the next. And, in spite of his want of schooling, he proved equal to the tasks demanded of a great general, administrator and statesman, of "the only man mentioned in history who was at once legislator and poet, the founder of a religion and of an empire" (Gilman). He valiantly repulsed the enemy's attacks, made effectual counter-moves, carried out social reforms, established legal discipline and began the fusion of the clans, at the same time that he proclaimed the Unity of God and inculcated the principles of morality. ¶

Muhammad was forced to have recourse to the sword in order to defend his followers and their common faith; had he not done so, his disciples, to all seeming, would have been annihilated, his religion suffocated in the cradle and he himself treated in the same manner as his illustrious predecessor. Nothing appears more natural, if God in His mercy meant to humanise the barbarous inhabitants of Arabia and raise them from the abyss of immorality and superstition into which they had sunk down, than that His choice should fall upon

a man full of determination and of unswerving fidelity to the task with which he was entrusted, a man endowed with a genius equal to every change of circumstances, capable of enduring hardship and of serving others without regard for his own interests, and ready to resist the oppressor even physically, if necessary, on behalf of his people. Gibbon reminds us that "in the state of nature every man "has a right to defend, by force of arms, his person "and his possessions, to repel, or even to prevent, "the violence of his enemies, and to extend his "hostilities to a reasonable measure of satisfaction "and retaliation." In the case of Muḥammad it was not to defend himself, but his followers and their freedom of conscience, that he had to use the sword; and this appears from the following passage, amongst others, in the Kur-ān: "Permission [to fight] is given to those who are fought against, because they are wronged who are turned out of their dwellings without other reason than that they say: God is our Lord."

Muhammad's life at Medina greatly differed from that in Mecca, but the one was not less admirable than the other, as will be apparent to every impartial observer, capable of taking into account the nature of the people Muḥammad had to deal with, the task to be accomplished, the peculiar circumstances etc. He had to carry out the great work of civil and social legislation and organisation, to bring order out of chaos, to reconcile the conflicting elements in the character of Meccans and Medinans, believers and unbelievers, to superintend a ceaseless resistance to the enemy and often himself to take

the field against him. Yet throughout all this, Muhammad never lost sight of his first and foremost duty. He was soldier, lawgiver, president of the commonwealth of Medina, but he was above all a prophet, appointed to put an end to the worship of idols, phenomena and human beings, to turn men towards the one and only God, to lead them into the path of righteousness; and in fulfilment of this mission he sent embassies to Abyssinia, Syria, Persia, Egypt, Damascus and Yamamah, inviting rich and poor, kings and their subjects, to embrace Islām. And it was this duty which was again foremost in his mind when at length, as the Kur-an expresses it, truth came and falsehood, being perishable, disappeared; when, eight years after he had been forced to fly for his life from Mecca, he re-entered it at the head of ten thousand devoted followers, according to the Kur-ānic text: "When the help of God cometh, and victory; and thou "seest men enter the religion of God in troops." His first act in this hour of triumph was to proclaim the Unity of God and to destroy the idols which defiled the temple.

The conquest was also remarkable for his magnanimity towards the vanquished foe, of which more anon. Two years later the Prophet, who, out of gratitude for the kindness shown him at Medina in the day of his tribulation, had gone back to live there, performed the pilgrimage, it is said, with a hundred thousand Muslims; for the soul-stirring *Kalimah* was now heard far and wide, echoing among the mountains as well as the plains, in the desert and the pasture-ground as well as in cities.

His work was now finished. He had weaned Arabia from idolatry, infanticide, legalised immorality of all kinds, unlimited polygamy and divorce, drunkenness, gambling and a host of other evils: the simple creed of Islām was that of the whole country, the God of Muḥammad was the God of its people. Hence tears filled the eyes of his disciples when they heard the verse "This day have I perfected my ordinances for you and accomplished my grace in you, and chosen Islām for you as your religion;" for they felt that the Prophet's mission was ended and that the time for him to leave them was come. Of this he himself was also fully convinced, and warned them of it during his farewell pilgrimage, telling them that he knew not if he should ever be able to speak to them in the same place again, urging them to treat one another as brothers, and bequeathing to them the law of the Kur-ān, which, he said, would always preserve them from error. Moreover, at the end, he exclaimed: "Oh Allah! I have fulfilled my mission": then, as the mighty shout "Yea, verily thou hast fulfilled it", went up from the multitudes, he added "Oh Allah, bear witness, I beseech Thee!"

He was in his sixty-third year, the tenth of the Hijrah and the 632nd of the Christian era, when the end came. He had seen it draw near without anxiety, for he had nothing to fear from death, he enjoyed the satisfaction of having given his work its finishing touch, and he left behind him a people of whom he had no reason to be ashamed. Up to his last hour the leading traits of his character were selflessness, magnanimity, sincerity and a humility not

forced upon him by circumstances, as it had been upon another well-known prophet, but adopted by him of his own free will, when all Arabia was at his feet. "If there be any man", said he a little before his death," whom I have unjustly chastised, I submit my own back to the scourge. If I have aspersed the character of any one, let him put me to shame in the presence of all. If I have taken what belongs to another, let him come forward and claim his own."

He considered his sufferings to be a proof of God's Mercy and Love, which he saw in everything. "By Him in Whose hand is Muḥammad's life," said he, "there is not a believer afflicted with calamity or disease, but God thereby causes his sins to fall from him as leaves fall from the trees in autumn."

Tenderly cared for by those he loved, and with the hearts of a whole population beating in sympathy for him, he died full of yearning to meet his Creator: and his last words, spoken after he had for some time, with uplifted eyes, silently communed with God, were: Oh Allah! be it so among the blessed on high!"

He wished his followers to say at his death, as they do to this day whenever they hear of a calamity, "Verily we belong to God and verily to him we shall return."

The eventful life of Muḥammad, as may be imagined, was full of trials and temptations, and a glance at some of these may not be amiss, as they help us to appreciate his character.

On one occasion the dignitaries of the tribe of

Kuraysh threatened that if Muhammad was not silenced they would take arms against Abū Tālib and not lay them down until their party or his was exterminated. Abu Tālib was naturally alarmed, and besought his nephew to stop preaching, as this had already led to troubles that were becoming unbearable, and would now cause bloodshed and ruin. But Muhammad, though grieved at the idea of being abandoned by his uncle, who had always protected him, did not waver for a moment: "Though they should array the sun against me on my right hand and the moon on my left," said he, "to draw back from my undertaking, yet would I not do so until God shall carry it to a successful issue, or I give up my life for it" (Abū-l-Fidā).

Bribery proved no more successful than intimidation. The Meccans sent one of their number to Muhammad, whom he addressed thus: "Oh son of my brother! It is strange indeed that thou, who art of distinguished birth and whose qualities are admired by all, shouldst stir up the land, sow dissension amongst our families, denounce the gods, and tax our ancestors and wise men with impiety. If it be thy ambition to acquire wealth by this strange conduct, we will collect a fortune for thee that shall make thee richer than us all; if honours and dignities be what thou desirest" [and be it noted that the guardianship of the Ka^cbah, which gave its holder the control of Mecca, was almost certain, had he not preached Islām, to fall to Muhammad's share on the death of Abū Tālib] "we will make thee our chief and obey all thy commands". Muhammad was not shaken for a

moment by the temptation, but immediately replied by quoting the Kur-ānic command to turn to God and ask forgiveness of Him.

In prosperity Muḥammad showed himself as far above petty motives as he had been in adversity. The surrender of Mecca, for instance, offered him ample opportunities of revenge: the haughty chiefs who had sought to destroy his religion, who had persecuted its adherents and ill-treated and attempted to murder himself, were now completely in his power. "What can you expect at my hands?" he asked them. "Mercy, Oh generous brother and nephew!" they besought him. Tears came into the eyes of the Prophet when he heard them: "I will speak to you," he continued, "as Joseph spoke to his brethren. I will not reproach you to-day: God will forgive you, for He is Merciful and Loving. Go; ye are free!"

If we try to imagine all the personal suffering and injury caused him by these people, their unrelenting persecution, the ostracism at Shi'b, their murderous pursuit when he fled for his life to Medina, their brutal treatment of his family and followers, we may indeed ask ourselves whether history affords any similar example of forbearance and magnanimity in one *able* — for this is the point — to take vengeance for all the wrong done him.

We Muslims are commanded by the Kur-ān to make no distinction between any of the prophets, and Christian writers have taken advantage of our prudence to claim that the spirit shown by Muḥammad differed widely from that of Christ, who,

when he was reviled, reviled not again. The only answer such people deserve is one in imitation of their own polemical methods — that Christ, according to the accounts of him to which they appeal, did not even wait till others reviled him, but was the first to have recourse to invective, calling his opponents a “generation of vipers” and the like. It is as well to go a little deeper into the matter, however. The story that Christ prayed for his murderers, used as a proof of great mildness on his part, leaves an opening for the sceptic to object that meekness and resignation were the only things left to him under the circumstances. The pardon by Muḥammad of his enemies, who had done their utmost to murder him and had more than once nearly succeeded, stands upon an entirely different footing, for they were in his power, not he in theirs.

A remarkable difference exists throughout between the lives, characters and work of the two great prophets: there is something essentially shadowy about the meekness, the humility, the righteousness, the magnanimity of the one, while those of the other stand forth, in their bold reality, as things eminently practical, capable of being submitted to the most rigorous tests. The short stay of Jesus upon earth may be responsible for the dreamy nature of his doctrines and reforms, and Muḥammad’s accomplishment of his mission to the very end for the concreteness of what he inculcated. Whatever the cause of this variety, however, it does not go beyond accessories; for, as originally delivered, the faith of Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad was one

in substance. Even now the Jews, like ourselves, proclaim the existence of one only God; and if Christians have lost sight of this great truth, the fact must be ascribed to corrupt doctrine introduced by the followers of Jesus, not to any attempt at self-deification on the part of that humble, righteous and noble soul. It is impossible here to examine the texts in the New Testament in which he repudiated any claim to what is due to God alone; suffice it then to say that they, too, show him to be guiltless of blasphemy, alleged by his enemies in justification of their desire to put an end to his life.

Since the religions of Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad are sisters, all derived from that of Abraham, they should unite for the purpose of drawing man towards one God, Almighty, Omnipresent, Just and Loving, a knowledge of Whom will keep man's passions under wholesome restraint and guide him into the path of truthfulness, honesty and righteousness. This knowledge is especially necessary in our materialistic age, which is turning man — the Vicegerent of God, as we Muslims are taught to consider him — into an insensible machine, whose ingenuity and energy are solely devoted to the acquisition of money. It is because the grasp of religion upon him has been loosened that the moral character of modern civilisation, reduced to the level of the morality obtaining in pre-Islamic Arabia, is so greatly degraded.

Muslims, it may be added, have always maintained an "open door" for those outside Islām, for the Kur-ān has taught them a catholicity that em-

braces all men, telling them that not they alone, but whoever, like the Jews, Sabians and Christians, "believe in God, the last e'erlasting day and act "aright, their meed is with their Lord; no fear shall "come upon them, nor the touch of woe." Every man, indeed, is responsible for his own actions: "On that day one soul shall be unable to do aught "for another." The soul, again, has been inspired with knowledge to distinguish, and power to choose between, good and evil: "blessed is he who hath preserved it pure, and wretched is he who hath defiled it."

Let Jews and Christians imitate the tolerant spirit of Islām. Christians, in particular, who lay claim to unparalleled meekness and humility as the followers of the mild Jesus, should cease to persecute the Jews and to heap coarse abuse on what Muslims hold dear. The religious and racial bigotry of Christian Europe is a shameful blot on the civilisation of which its inhabitants boast so much. They would do well to give it up, and to follow the excellent example of forbearance set them by the Messenger of God.

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And departing leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.

THE MIRACLE OF MUHAMMAD.

We have gathered here to celebrate the birthday of the man whom Carlyle, the great thinker of the past century, called the Hero-Prophet: the man who, if we examine the sphere of his activity and the task set him, is unparalleled, nay, unapproached, in genius and achievement. I do not mean by this to attribute any supernatural character to him, as has been done in the case of certain other reformers; whose followers, in their misguided endeavour to raise them above the reality, lower them even in the eyes of those disposed to rank them high. No: in the words put into his mouth by the Kur-ān, he was "nothing but a man like yourselves"; and it is the denial that he was more than an ordinary mortal which has brought his natural gifts into relief, compelling even those most hostile, if they be but honest, to admit that he was at the least a mighty genius. In like manner, while the supernatural acts which other prophets are said to have performed evoke scepticism and incredulity, Muḥammad's miracle, the political, social, mental, moral and theological transformation effected by him in Arabia,

¹ A paper read in London on May 18, 1905, at the celebration, by the Pan-Islamic Society, of the Nativity of the Prophet.

and whose consequences pervade the whole world, cannot but command belief.

In order that you may realise how exceptionally arduous his task was and judge for yourselves whether the revolution he brought about in the people and their character deserves the name of miracle, I shall try to show you Arabia as it was before and after the advent of Muḥammad and explain the nature of his achievement. I shall chiefly adduce English authors in support of my remarks.

*Geographical position and climatic conditions
of Arabia.*

Arabia is a peninsula, of the shape of an irregular triangle, east of the Red Sea. It is thus described by Gibbon:

“But the dreary waste of Arabia, a boundless
“level of sand, is intersected by sharp and naked
“mountains, and the face of the desert, without shade
“and shelter, is scorched by the direct and intense
“rays of a tropical sun. Instead of refreshing breezes,
“the winds, particularly from the south-west, diffuse
“a noxious and even a deadly vapour; the hillocks
“of sand, which alternately rise and scatter, are
“compared to billows of the ocean and whole cara-
“vans, whole armies, have been lost and buried in
“the whirlwind. The common benefits of water are
“an object of desire and contest, and such is the
“scarcity of wood that some art is requisite to pre-
“serve and propagate the element of fire. Arabia is
“destitute of navigable rivers, which fertilise the soil
“and convey its produce to the adjacent regions.
“The torrents that fall from the hills are imbibed

“by the thirsty earth; the rare and hardy plants, “the tamarind or the acacia, that strike their roots “into the clefts of the rocks, are nourished by the “dew of the night.”

Brief historical outline of Arabia before Muḥammad.

Glimpses of ancient history show that the Abyssinians, Persians and Romans succeeded in subduing the country for a short time, but the nation — if this word can be used of a nomadic and divided people — defied the attempts at permanent occupation of even the most powerful monarchs. Neither Cyrus nor Trajan was able to conquer the region, and all the civilising influence of the Romans was powerless against the dwellers in that sea of sand and stone. At the time of Muḥammad's birth the country was nominally a province of the Persian Empire, yet, Gibbon tells us, seven Homerite Kings reigned in the mountains. Each tribe had its own leader; no two tribes were allied, neither was there much unity among the members of a tribe themselves. The bond between the different units was so slight, indeed, that an affray during a horse-race was sufficient to banish peace from the land for forty years. According to Mr. Gilman “before the “days of Kossai there had been no real government in “Arabia. Every man did that which was right in his “own eyes, acknowledging but indefinite allegiance “to his own tribe; and even now government depended “upon force, and was liable at any time to be over- “thrown. Such was the condition of affairs as the “years of ignorance approached their end; the time

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“arrived when the outer world was destined to interfere in the affairs of the Peninsula and an Eastern miracle was about to be seen”. A unique, marvellous miracle it was indeed.

*Religions that were known in Arabia before
Muhammad.*

Every kind of creed was to be met with in the Peninsula before the days of the Prophet. Not only the native superstitions, but Judaism, Sabianism, Zoroastrianism and a number of conflicting Christian sects had their votaries. The bulk of the people remained impervious to outside influences, and observed a fluctuating idolatry of their own. “Each tribe,” says Gibbon, “each family, each independent warrior created and changed the rites and the objects of his fantastic worship.” Emmanuel Deutsch says that they believed in “the hosts of Heaven”, but they did not confine their worship to the sun, moon and stars; it also embraced stones, demons and fetiches. Each tribe had its own idol in the Ka‘bah, where Rahel, al-Lāt and al-‘Uzzā headed a collection of three hundred and sixty, shaped like human beings, eagles, lions etc. Human sacrifice was very prevalent, parents even dragging their own sons to the altar; female children were considered unworthy to be offered up, and were buried alive instead.

Both Judaism and Christianity failed to move Arabia, as is admitted even by such a witness as Sir William Muir; who, carried away by fanaticism, has made his book a philippic against Islām instead

of the impartial and critical biography one had a right to expect, and, in his eagerness to put everything connected with Muḥammad in the worst possible light, has sought to explain away and minimise whatever favourable point he found it impossible to ignore. Sir William, however, has allowed the following avowal to escape him: "After five centuries of Christian evangelisation we can point to "but a sprinkling here and there of Christian converts. . . . Judaism, vastly more powerful, had contributed spasmodic efforts of proselytism, but as an "active and converting agent the Jewish faith was "no longer operative. In fine, viewed in a religious "aspect, the surface of Arabia had been now and "then gently rippled by the feeble efforts of Christianity. The sterner influences of Judaism had been "occasionally visible in a deeper and more troubled "current, but the tide of indigenous idolatry and of "Ishmaelitic superstition, setting strongly from every "quarter towards the Caaba, give ample evidence "that the faith and worship of Mecca held the Arab "mind in a thralldom rigorous and undisputed."

The Jews do not profess to be a proselytising people, but are rather exclusive, so it is not astonishing that they did not or could not make much impression upon the people of Arabia. It is more worthy of note that Christianity, too, completely failed to effect any appreciable change for the better either in the religious ideas or in the moral and social condition of the latter; for, according to Gibbon, the prince of historians — a more reliable authority than Sir William Muir —, the Christians outstripped the Jews in striving to gain

converts. "Seven hundred years before the death of "Mahomet," he writes, "the Jews were settled in "Arabia.... The Christian missionaries were still "more active and successful: the catholics asserted "their universal reign; the sects whom they oppressed "successively retired beyond the limits of the Roman "Empire; the Marcionites and the Manicheans dispersed their phantastic opinions and apocryphal "gospels." Nay, the Christians not only strove to propagate their religion by means of Arabic versions of their scriptures, but even had recourse to the sword. "The Kingdom of Yemen", says Gibbon, "was subject to the Christian princes of Abyssinia. "Their vassal Abrahah was provoked by an insult "to avenge the honour of the cross; and the holy "city was invested by a train of elephants and an "army of Africans." It may be gathered from these passages that proselytism was as rife among Christians as it is now, when they spend enormous sums upon religious propagandism and bring the artillery of the great Powers to the support of their missionaries. The results, as we know from Sir William Muir, were as meagre as they are in our day.

A comparison between Islam and Christianity as civilising forces may not be out of place here. The former brought its followers to the pinnacle of knowledge and advancement when those of the latter, though they had been given nearly six centuries and a half more in which to bring forth their fruits, were still steeped in the most profound ignorance. In fact, as Mr. Bosworth Smith tells us, "during the darkest period of European history the "Arabs for five hundred years held up the torch of

"learning to humanity." True, neglect of the enlightened spirit and the characteristic commonsense of the Prophet has done the Muslims much harm, but even so, according to Canon Isaac Taylor, their tenets have a more thorough civilising power than those of the Christians. "It is not the first propagation of Islam that has to be explained," he says, "but it is the permanency with which it retains its hold upon its converts. Christianity is less tenacious in its grasp. An African tribe, once converted to Islam, never reverts to paganism and never embraces Christianity. . . . *Islam has done more for civilisation than Christianity.* Take, for example, the statements of English officials or of lay teachers as to the practical results of Islam. When Mohammedanism is embraced by a negro tribe, paganism, devil-worship, fetichism, cannibalism, human sacrifice, infanticide, witchcraft, at once disappear. The natives begin to dress, filth is replaced by cleanliness and they acquire personal dignity and self-respect. Hospitality becomes a religious duty, drunkenness becomes rare, gambling is forbidden, immodest dances and the promiscuous intercourse of the sexes ceases. Female chastity is regarded as a virtue; industry replaces idleness. . . . law, order and sobriety prevail, blood-feuds, cruelty to animals and to slaves are forbidden. A feeling of humanity, benevolence and brotherhood is inculcated. Polygamy and slavery are regulated, their evils restrained. Islām, above all, is the most powerful total abstinence association in the world, whereas the extension of European trade means the extension of drunkenness and vice and the degradation of the people. Islām introduces

“a civilisation of no low order, including a knowledge of reading and writing, decent clothing, personal cleanliness, veracity and self-respect. Its restraining and civilising effects are marvellous. How little have we to show for the vast sums of money and all the precious lives lavished upon Africa! Christian converts are reckoned by thousands, Moslem converts by millions. These are the stern facts we have to face: it is a pity to ignore them. We ought to begin by recognising the fact that Islām is not an anti-Christian faith, but a half Christian faith.”

These are “stern facts” indeed. Islām, without expensive missionaries and without worldly temptations, is spreading, which shows that there is something intrinsically attractive in it. And if such is the case now, when its followers have allowed it to be covered with parasitic growths and have lost much of their zeal, what must have been its charm at the time of its full bloom! Mr. Lilly says: “It is the same faith which in our day makes the Moslem preacher the most successful of proselytizers; potent to expel from many dark places of the earth barbarous and impure idolatries and to train millions of converts to better things by its doctrines of righteousness and temperance and judgment to come”.

The manners, moral and social condition and character of the ancient Arabs.

The people of Arabia were fond of poetry, and were warlike and brave by nature; but, Gibbon informs us, “the arts of grammar, of metre and of rhetoric were unknown to the freeborn eloquence

“of the Arabians”, whilst, “according to the remark of Pliny, the Arabian tribes are equally addicted to theft and to merchandise: the caravans that traverse the desert are ransomed or pillaged and their neighbours, since the remote time of Job and Sesostris, have been the victims of their rapacious spirit. . . . A single robber or a few associates are branded with their genuine name, but the exploits of a numerous band assume the character of a lawful and honourable war. The temper of a people, thus armed against mankind, was doubly inflamed by the domestic license of rapine, murder and revenge. . . . Each Arab, with impunity and renown, might point the javelin against the life of his countryman.”

The Arabs would accept no compensation if one of their tribe was killed; nay, they would often insist upon taking vengeance on an innocent member of the slayer's family rather than on himself. This murder, again, had to be avenged by the other side, and led to further reprisals; and, as Gibbon points out, either family led a life of malice and suspicion, while fifty years sometimes elapsed before the account of vengeance was finally settled. Drink, adultery and gambling were common: there were no moral, religious or social restrictions, no limits to marriages, no restraints on divorce. A son inherited a father's wife with the rest of his chattels: a man would marry an orphan for her money, and leave or illtreat her as soon as he had secured it. A divorced woman was not allowed to re-marry, as this might have seemed a slur upon her husband. Revengeful women did not feel satisfied until they

had made their teeth meet in the heart of their enemy or had dyed their garments with his blood. Slaves were treated like beasts. Not only human sacrifices and the burying alive of children, but suicides, were frequent, while bloody quarrels were an everyday occurrence, and death was often the penalty of a single rash word. In short, to quote Gibbon again, "In this primitive and abject state, which ill deserves the name of society, the human brute, without arts or laws, almost without sense and language, is poorly distinguished from the rest of the animal creation."

The circumstances of Muhammad and the task before him.

Such was the condition of Arabia when Muhammad was born. We do not feel ashamed to acknowledge that he himself could neither read nor write; that, although of noble parentage, he was not very well off; and that, beyond making two journeys to Bassora and Damascus, the one when he was only thirteen and the other when twenty-five, he had never seen anything of the world outside his birth-place. Had he died before his fortieth year, he would have left no mark in history, for he was merely known for his great trustworthiness, straightforwardness and geniality. This was the man who heard the call "Oh thou that art covered; arise and preach; and magnify thy Lord. Purify thy garments and shun abominations; and do not expect a return for thy liberality, but wait patiently for thy Lord."

The task before him was a hard one indeed. The people with whom he had to deal were attached, with the obstinacy of gross ignorance, to their degrading superstitions and their barbarous rites and practices, so that he had anything but unencumbered soil to work upon. He could not, like the first Christian preachers to the Gentiles, attract his hearers by the novelty of a radical reform, for both Judaism and Christianity had already familiarised them with the existence of ideas totally different from their own. Nay, while ignoring the message addressed to themselves by these creeds, they had adopted the belief in angels and the like, and had given it material shape in the national pantheon, thus adding to the corruptions that Muhammad had to sweep away. He had against him, too, the physical condition of the country, whose utter barrenness seemed destined by nature to exclude all change for the better. Who could have foreseen that that sea of sand would one day be the metropolis of an empire, and would acquire such prominence and sanctity as to make a visit to it at least once in a lifetime the cherished object of a fifth of the human race? That its wild inhabitants, scantily provided with such common blessings as water and a refreshing breeze, steeped in vice and mental darkness, would become the rulers of a large portion of the globe and the pioneers of civilisation, Europe's masters in literature and the arts and sciences, and the builders of great public works?

Gibbon writes, of this wonderful transformation: "The genius of the Arabian prophet, the manners of his nation and the spirit of his religion involve

“the cause of the decline and fall of the Eastern Empire, and our eyes are curiously intent on one of the most memorable revolutions which have impressed a new and lasting character on the nations of the globe.” Mr. Gilman adds: “History is crowded with wrecks of systems of religion which have been outgrown by mankind. The career of the prophet is never an easy one; he may pipe, but his audience may refuse to keep time to the march he entunes. It is comparatively easy to make good and far-reaching plans, but more difficult to carry them out. Least of all is it easy for a prophet to gain a hearing in his own country and among his own kin, among those who have known him as a child, as a boy, as a growing youth, and finally as a man, liable to the inconsistencies of a man, to the irregularities of a man, to the failures to which humanity is ever exposed. Yet this, all of this, is what Mohammed, the unlearned Arabian, the camel-driver of the widow Khadija, attempted.” He, who perhaps could not write his own name, declared himself not only to be a teacher, but the teacher who must alone be listened to in the most important matter that concerns humanity, the regulation of its loftiest duties to the most high God.

The miracle.

All this Muhammad not only attempted, but accomplished. Nay, the miracle was accompanied by another — the bold and clear prophecy that he would succeed. He saw the Empires of Greece

and Persia in their might, and told his handful of followers that ere long they would belong to the Muslims. He never lost courage, even when he was persecuted, attacked and exiled, when his adherents were defeated, when he was laughed at as a madman and a sorcerer, when in the cave with a solitary companion, he was in imminent danger of falling into the hands of his bloodthirsty enemies. God, he believed, was with him; and the event proved him to be right. Turn over the pages of the Kur-ān, and you will find the success and spread of Islām foretold again and again. Strange that these prophecies, fulfilled as they have been to the letter, should be treated with scepticism by those who eagerly swallow, as miracles, certain events of which there is no historical proof!

Such feats have also been attributed to Muḥammad, but, as he very sensibly refused to make wonder-working the criterion of truth, Muslims do not attach great importance to stories of miraculous performances by him, especially as they have wonder-workers in plenty in their midst: men who, by the purification and elevation of their soul, by self-control and abnegation, obtain a spiritual power called Karāmat, the cultivation of which has become a science. By means of this Shams-i-Tabrīz, for example, is said to have performed Jesus Christ's greatest miracle, the raising of dead bodies to life; while Wārith ^cAlī Shāh, who but recently breathed his last in India, was no less gifted.

The source of Muḥammad's inspiration.

The sublime Theism and the practical code of morals preached by Muḥammad were not derived either from the Jews or the Christians. Of the "former Mr. Justice Ameer Ali says: "The characteristics which had led the Israelites repeatedly "to lapse into idolatry in their original homes, "when seers were in their midst to denounce their "backslidings, would hardly preserve them from the "heathenism of their Arab mothers. With an idea of "the God of Abraham they would naturally combine "a materialistic conception of the Deity, and hence "we find them rearing a statue representing Abraham, "with the ram beside him ready for sacrifice, in the "Kaaba."

To the credit of the Jews be it said, I am not aware that they ever claimed to be Muḥammad's teachers, but as Christians have often attributed that character to themselves as well as to the Israelites, it may be as well to see what Gibbon has to say on the matter. "The Christians of the seventh "century," he writes, "had insensibly relapsed into "a semblance of paganism; their public and private "vows were addressed to the relics and images that "disgraced the temples of the East: the throne of "the Almighty was darkened by a crowd of martyrs, "saints and angels, the objects of popular veneration; "and the Collyridian heretics, who flourished in the "fruitful soil of Arabia, invested the Virgin Mary "with the name and honours of a goddess. The "mysteries of the trinity and incarnation appear to "contradict the principle of the Divine Unity. In

“their obvious sense, they introduce three equal “deities, and transform the man Jesus into the substance of the son of God: an orthodox commentary “will satisfy only a believing mind. . . . The creed of “Mahomet is free from the suspicion of ambiguity, “and the Koran is a glorious testimony to the Unity “of God.”

Could such people even approach, I ask, the conception of the God of Muḥammad, which, as may be gathered from passages like the following, is to this day so far above the ideal of the Christian and other religions, in spite of reforms and revivals? Here is one of the Kur-ān’s descriptions: “He is “God, beside Whom there is no other God, the “Knower of what is hidden and revealed; He is the “Loving, the Kind. He is God, beside Whom there “is no other God, the King, the Holy, the Saviour, “the Faithful, the Guardian, the Glorious, the Powerful, “the Self-magnifying. Far is He above what they “join with Him! He is God the Creator, the Producer, the Fashioner. His are the beautiful Names, “Whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth praiseth “Him, and He is the Mighty, the Wise”.

Forget, if you will, the wonderful revolution brought about by Muḥammad, or the practical code of high morality which he diffused, deny him the credit for all else, if you are so far the slave of prejudice, but can you shut your eyes to his God? As He is really shown in the Kur-ān — not as calumnious Christian controversialists say that it represents Him, which is quite a different thing — it is impossible to conceive aught holier, nobler, purer, more sublime, more perfect, more supreme

and more worthy of the Godhead than the God Whom Muḥammad worshipped. The Ideal cannot be improved upon: one Attribute taken from it would mar its perfection, not one could be added to it that would not be superfluous. Had Muḥammad done nothing besides giving the world this lofty Conception, he would still occupy the highest rank among the seekers after the Divine and the benefactors of mankind. The Ideal he loved will ever stand forth as a protest against all attempts to return to paganism, polytheism, the worship of idols or of matter. He has boldly and indelibly impressed the notion of the strictest Monotheism upon the pages of history, and towards this notion rational man cannot but drift surely, if slowly.

To return to the influence that brought about the revolution of which Muḥammad was the centre, Carlyle speaks of it thus: "A silent great soul, he "was one of those who cannot but be in earnest, "whom nature herself has appointed to be sincere. "While others walk in formulas and hearsays, contented enough to dwell therein, this man could not "screen himself in formulas, he was alone with his "whole soul and the reality of things. The great "mystery of existence glared in upon him with its "terrors, with its splendours; no hearsays could hide "that unspeakable fact: 'Here am I.' Such sincerity, "as we named it, has in truth something of the divine. "The word of such a man is a voice direct from "nature's own heart. Men do and must listen to that or to nothing else; all else is wind in comparison. "From of old a thousand thoughts in his pilgrimage "and wanderings had been in this man. 'What am

"I? What is this unfathomable thing I live in, which
 "men name universe? what is life? what is death?
 "what am I to believe? what am I to do?" The grim
 "rocks of Mount Hira, of Mount Sinai, the stern,
 "sandy solitude answered not. The great heaven,
 "rolling silently overhead with its bright glancing
 "stars, answered not. There was no answer. The man's
 "own soul and what of God's inspiration dwelt there
 "had to answer."

There was, indeed, no one but his own great soul[^]
 to help him, nothing save God's inspiration to teach
 him, none other except the invincible and all-con-
 quering force of truth to support him, nought be-
 sides the invulnerable shield of a high Morality to
 protect him in his path of reform. It was these
 things alone which enabled him to overcome every
 obstacle, to exalt his barbarous countrymen and
 ennoble their thoughts.

The change effected by Muḥammad in the Arabs.

Jaʿfar al-Ṭayyār, one of about ninety Muslims
 forced, in the fifth year of the Prophet's proclamation
 of his mission, to take refuge in Abyssinia, told the
 Christian King of that country what Muḥammad had
 done in that short time. "Oh King!" said he, "we
 were an ignorant and misled people, we worshipped
 images, ate dead bodies, were lewd, ill-treated our
 neighbours, and the strong despoiled the weak of
 their property. We had long been in this condition
 when God sent a Prophet to us from amongst our
 own people, whose noble birth, truthfulness, honesty
 and righteousness were well known to us. He called

us to God, to worship Him, and Him only, and to leave off adoring the idols and stones before which our fathers and forefathers knelt. He ordered us to obey God alone, and not to make anyone His equal. He made it incumbent upon us to offer up prayer, to give alms, to fast when not sick or travelling. He commanded us to speak the truth, to give back safe and whole what is entrusted to us by others, to be affectionate to our relations and kind to our neighbours, to shun wicked acts, licentiousness and bloody quarrels. He told us not to bear false evidence, not to deprive orphans of their property, not to impute bad motives, or be suspicious of women. We have taken his advice and admonitions to heart, have believed in his truthfulness, have followed all the orders which God has made known to us, and have believed in the unity of God. We abstain from what is forbidden and confine ourselves to what is permitted. Our people are infuriated at this change in our belief, thoughts and actions. They have persecuted us, and done their best to force us back to the idols, images and wicked acts which we have left. When it became impossible to live among them, and when persecution and torture became unbearable, we left our country, and, believing you to be a tolerant king, have taken refuge in your dominions." It may be added, to the credit of that Christian monarch, that he sent away the persecutors who asked him to give up the exiles, refusing the presents they had brought and declaring himself on the side of truth and justice.

Sir William Muir's testimony.

Even Sir William Muir has had to acknowledge that Muḥammad effected a marvellous revolution. "Few and simple," he writes, "were the precepts of Muḥammad up to this time. His teaching had wrought a marvellous and a mighty work. Never since the days when primitive Christianity startled the world from its sleep and waged mortal combat with heathenism had men seen the like arousing of spiritual life, the like faith that suffered sacrifices and took joyfully the spoiling of goods for conscience sake.

"From time beyond memory Mecca and the whole Peninsula had been steeped in spiritual torpor. The slight and transient influences of Judaism, Christianity or philosophical inquiry upon the Arab mind had been but as the ruffling here and there of the surface of a quiet lake; all remained still and motionless below. The people were sunk in superstition, cruelty and vice. It was a common practice for the eldest son to take to wife his father's widows, inherited as property with the rest of the estate. Pride and poverty had introduced among them (as they have among the Hindus) the crime of female infanticide. Their religion was a gross idolatry and their faith rather the dark superstitious dread of unseen beings, whose goodwill they sought to propitiate and whose displeasure to avert, than the belief in an over-ruling Providence. The life to come and retribution of good and evil were, as motives of actions, practically unknown.

"Thirteen years before the Hijra, Mecca lay life-

"less in this debased state. What a change had those
 "thirteen years now produced! A band of several
 "hundred persons had rejected idolatry, adopted the
 "worship of one God and surrendered themselves
 "implicitly to the guidance of what they believed
 "as revelation from Him, praying to the Almighty
 "with frequency and fervour, looking for pardon to
 "His mercy and striving to follow after good works,
 "almsgiving, chastity and justice. They now lived
 "under a constant sense of the omnipotent power of
 "God and of His providential care over the minutest
 "of their concerns. In all the gifts of nature, in every
 "relation of life, at each turn of their affairs indivi-
 "dual or public, they saw His hand. And above all,
 "the new existence in which they exulted was regarded
 "as the mark of special grace, while the unbelief of
 "their blinded fellow-citizens was the hardening stamp
 "of reprobation. Muḥammad was the minister of life
 "to them, the source under God of their new born
 "hopes, and to him they yielded an implicit sub-
 "mission.

"In so short a period Mecca had, from his wonder-
 "ful movement, been rent into two factions which,
 "unmindful of their old landmarks of tribe and family,
 "had arrayed themselves in deadly opposition one
 "against the other. The Believers bore persecution
 "with a patient and tolerant spirit, and though it
 "was their wisdom so to do, the credit of magnani-
 "mous forbearance may be freely accorded. One
 "hundred men and women, rather than abjure their
 "precious faith, had abandoned home and sought
 "refuge, till the storm should be overpast, in Abys-
 "sinian exile, and now again a still larger number,

“with the Prophet himself, were emigrating from their fondly-loved city with its sacred temple, to them the holiest spot on earth, and fleeing to Medina. There the same marvellous charm had within two or three years been preparing for them a brotherhood ready to defend the Prophet and his followers with their blood. Jewish truth had long sounded in the ears of the men of Medina, but it was not until they heard the spirit stirring strains of the Arabian prophet that they, too, awoke from their slumber and sprang suddenly into a new and earnest life.”

What Muḥammad gave Arabia and mankind.

Muḥammad introduced law amongst a people who had never known such a thing before him, and his law proved equal to dealing with every condition of life in different phases and stages of society and civilisation. Urquhart, speaking of it, says, “The excellence and effectiveness of each of these principles (each capable of immortalising its founder) gave value to the rest; and all combined endowed the system which they formed with an energy exceeding those of any other political system. Within the lifetime of a man, though in the hands of a population wild, ignorant and insignificant, it spread over a greater extent than the dominions of Rome. While it retained its primitive character, it was irresistible”. But Muḥammad was not a mere lawgiver: he got people, without compulsion, to yield steadfast obedience to his law.

Muḥammad gave his degraded countrymen a practical, sound moral code, worthy of the world’s ad-

miration even at the present day, as may be inferred from the following tribute of Canon Taylor: "Let us remember that in some respects the Muslim morality is better than our own. In resignation to God's will, in temperance, charity, veracity and in the brotherhood of believers they set us a pattern we should do well to follow. Islām has abolished drunkenness, gambling and prostitution, the three curses of Christian lands. Islām is the closest approach to Christianity which has been able to take hold of Eastern and Southern nations. It is superior to the grovelling superstition of the Coptic and Abyssinian Churches". Count de Boulainvilliers is also of opinion that, outside Christianity, there is no doctrinal system so reasonable as Islām, so comforting to well-doers, so terrible to sinners: while Barthélémy St. Hilaire says: "With the exception of Christianity, founded on the Old Testament and the Gospels with all their marvellous consequences, the world can boast of no religion that may properly be compared with Islām, or that merits even a remote comparison with it". John Davenport, it may be added in this connection, has accurately gauged the difference between Christianity and Islam. "It must be borne in mind", he writes, "that whereas the hold the former has over its professors is naturally referred by them to its dogmas, thus causing religion and morals to be regarded as distinct from each other; in the latter it is on the contrary, not the dogmatic, but the practical portion which has influenced the moral, social, legal and political ideas and circumstances of its believers. So that, to the Mohammedan mind, patriotism, legality, tradition, constitution,

“right, are all included in that one word — Islām. “..... the religion thus established by the Kor-ān “is a stern and severe Monotheism: it has nothing “abstract and indistinct in its primary notion of the “Godhead. Allah, so far from being a mere philoso- “phic first cause regulating the universe by established “laws, while itself stands aloof in unapproachable “majesty, is an ever present, everworking energy. It “is a religion, moreover, stripped of all controversy, “and which, proposing no mystery to offer violence “to reason, restricts the imagination of men to the “being satisfied with a plain, invariable worship, not- “withstanding the fiery passions and blind zeal that “so often transported them beyond themselves. “Lastly, it is a religion from which all worship of “saints and martyrs, relics and images, all mystery “and metaphysical subtlety, all monastic seclusion “and enthusiastic penance is banished; and which “bears internal proofs of having been the result of “long and deep meditation upon the nature of things, upon the state and condition of the nations of the “world at that time, and upon the reconcilmenty “of the objects of religion with those of reason”.

Muḥammad, besides creating morality, so to speak, in Arabia, regulated the social condition of the country, abolished usury, restricted polygamy, founded laws of inheritance and turned the Arabs from savage sensualists into a law-abiding, sober people.

Muḥammad, to whom the world owes a religion not only phenomenal in its exalted idea of the Creator and in its practical rules for the guidance of the creature, but also compatible with the greatest material and scientific progress, inspired his coun-

trymen, who had shown themselves anything but intellectually and spiritually minded up to his time, with a thirst for knowledge that was to make them the light of Europe; moreover, they have found in his teachings the germ of a mysticism which, under the name of "Sūfī-ism", vies with that of the Hindu and the Buddhist. The member of this denomination best known in England — and who, in spite of his freethinking, was as much attached to the Kur-ān and to Muḥammad as the most orthodox — is 'Omar Khayyām, only reckoned a second-rate Sūfī, however, among his brethren.

The Sūfī adepts furnish an additional reply to the favourite Christian calumny that Muḥammad, by setting a material paradise before his followers, pandered to their passions; an accusation best met, when dealing with such people as those who make it, by pointing out that Christ, if they were right, must be found guilty of pandering to the vanity and ambition of his disciples when he told them, for instance, that they should sit upon thrones and judge the tribes of Israel. It may be explained to more reasonable people, besides, that the allowances made in biblical interpretation for the richness of Oriental imagery are no less necessary to the right understanding of the Kur-ān, which cannot be judged, as Europeans are so fond of doing, by the standards applicable to a Western book written in their day for Western readers. And that this imagery has a spiritual meaning may be proved, not only by an intrinsic examination into which there is not space to enter here, but also by the fact that the Sūfīs have found no more difficulty in recognising this

meaning in the passages attacked than have Christian, mystics in giving a similar explanation of the "hundredfold" promised by Christ.

Arabia as changed by Muhammad.

Carlyle, speaking of the Prophet's work, says: "To the Arab nation it was a birth from darkness into light. Arabia first became alive by means of it. A poor shepherd people, roaming unnoticed in its deserts since the creation of the world: a Hero-Prophet was sent down to them with a word they could believe: see, the unnoticed becomes world-noticeable, the small has grown world-great; within one century afterwards, Arabia is at Grenada at this hand, at Delhi on that; glancing in valour and splendour and the light of genius, Arabia shines through long ages over a great section of the world. Belief is great, life-giving. The history of a nation becomes fruitful, soul-elevating, great, so soon as it believes. These Arabs, the man Mohammed, and that one century — is it not as if a spark had fallen, one spark, on a world of what seemed black, unnoticeable sand? But lo, the sand proves explosive powder, blazes heaven high from Delhi to Grenada!" In Arabia itself the change was accomplished in less than a tenth part of the time: it seemed as if some extraordinary power had renewed everything in the country. The Ka'bah was the same, but what had become of its three hundred and sixty idols? The people were the same, but what had become of their hard-heartedness, spirit of revenge, anarchy, female degradation, rivalry, lawlessness, usury, drunken-

ness, infanticide, bloody quarrels, human sacrifices and superstitions? All these had vanished for good, and the divided idolaters had become strict Monotheists, a brotherhood under one leader and one authority, following the same law, aspiring after the noblest ideals, practising the highest morality; having their own organisers, champions, heroes, men of thought and action, worthy to adorn the most civilised nations and peoples. Moreover, while the glory attained in a hundred years has faded, ungratefully hunted from Grenada and deprived of its sustaining power at Delhi, the ten years' light of Arabia still burns in the hearts of millions upon millions of people, and shall do so as long as the sun continues to shine, for there is within it, brighter than the sun itself, an indestructible germ of advance and civilisation.

The voice of Muḥammad, the illiterate, the helpless, the persecuted, was not, believe me, the mere voice of a man. It was a thunder, a lightning from Above — a thunder that roused men from their death-like sleep, a lightning that burnt up their deep-rooted vice and immorality, and, at the same time, revealed a "Kingdom of Heaven" upon earth, inhabited by people of angelic piety, saintly veracity and heroic courage, sublime, serene, self-sacrificing, magnanimous, patriotic, generous, philanthropic, kind and helpful even to the brute creation, loving their neighbours, protecting and sheltering the orphan and the destitute.

His voice was not the proverbial cry in the wilderness, echoed by rocks and sand alone. It was heard in the wilderness, indeed, but it was not ineffectual,

for it was the Voice of Him Who rules and pervades the universe, put into the mouth of the man called by us Muslims the Messenger and Friend of God, but whom Christians, so attached to that expression, might well call the Son of God. A most dutiful son, too: glorifying none but Him, the Father above, magnifying His glory and clearing His name of the human passions and frailties linked with It, with remarkable self-denial, humility, perseverance and zeal, and an enthusiasm that carried conviction to the hearts of those that heard him. As Carlyle has said, "men do and must listen to it or to nothing "else, all else is wind in comparison"; and men did listen to it, and have been listening to it these thirteen hundred years. That cry of Muḥammad can be heard to this day in every corner of the world. even in England, America, Australia and Japan, by all whose ears are not dulled by prejudice, and it will continue to be heard to the end of time, for it contains the truth of which the Persian poet has sung: "Each blade of grass that springs "forth from the earth cries: He is alone, no one is "His companion." The Muslim profession of Faith: 'There is no divinity but God: Muḥammad is the messenger of God', is an imperishable Fact.

Muslim progress not due to chance.

The further advance of Arabia, after Muḥammad had kindled the blaze of which Carlyle speaks, is by no means inexplicable; he who reads the Kur-ān with discernment will find all the subsequent glory of Islām foreshadowed there. Muḥammad left his fol-

lowers with nothing wanting to make them what they became within a hundred years.

The great factor in the improvement of a people — unity in the endeavour to attain some object — was theirs from the moment the first convert was made. Muḥammad said that ‘Alī’s flesh was his flesh and ‘Alī’s blood his blood, a remark doubtless spoken of ‘Alī as of a dearly loved relative and a brave and staunch friend, but which can also be taken in a general sense. Every person, male or female, high or low, Pagan, Christian or Jew who embraced Islām, became at once the flesh and blood of other Muslims. Their membership increased daily, but their unity remained the same. Even when Islām spread far and wide, the distinct individuality of the Muslim body was not lost. Whatever the origin of a convert before he embraced Islām, whatever his race, colour, country, civilisation, once a Muslim he became one with all other Muslims. The brotherhood of Islām welded them all into one whole, and their united strength carried all before it, in whatever direction they turned.

Another element is necessary to the advance of a people — enthusiasm and vitality. This reached perfection among the Muslims, inspired by the stirring words of the Kur-ān and by Muḥammad’s sincerity, which, as Carlyle says, must have had something divine in it. To exalt his religion and to make the world resound with that eternal truth “*Lā ilāha ill’ Allahu*” was every Muslim’s object throughout his life. He lived in it, he died for it; his privations, his sufferings, his achievements were all directed to that end.

It is related that, when on the point of striking an enemy to the ground in battle, ‘Alī sheathed his sword when his foe spat at him: for he was fighting for his faith, not to revenge private insult. Muḥammad’s companions, indeed, were not spurred on by personal ambition or other selfish considerations, and it was the purity and loftiness of their motives that raised even the humblest of them so far above the most powerful rulers of the earth, making him consider himself their superior, ennobled as he was by the faith which they lacked. A Muslim sage has said, “He who fears not God of his own „free-will must fear mankind of necessity.” Muḥammad’s followers, who imitated him in freely fearing God, became fearless of mankind. At the same time they made no distinction among themselves, between high or low, rich or poor; and it is said that the mighty ‘Omar, whose staff inspired more fear than the swords of others, quailed beneath the resentment of a helpless old Muslim woman.

The laws and rules given the Muslims were another element that prepared them for what was to come. They were provided with directions for private conduct, social relations, administration, inheritance and every other aspect of life; hence, when their unity and enthusiasm had placed kingdoms within their power, they were not at a loss how to govern them. Their laws, though treating in the first place of their relation to God, taught them all that was essential to the life of a peaceful citizen, a brave soldier, a loving husband, a devoted wife, a dutiful son, an affectionate parent, a righteous man, a judicious administrator, a scholar or a man of business.

All this shows that the stupendous progress of the Muslims after Muhammad cannot be attributed to chance, but was built upon the foundation laid in his time. This foundation, a very firm and sound one, still exists, and it is only necessary to fall back upon it in order to obtain the same results as in the past. I quite agree with Mr. Suhrawardy, a living example of Islamic self-abnegation and self-effacement, when he says in substance: "Back, back to the 'days of Muḥammad!' This should be the watchword of every Muslim. This is the talisman that shall restore to you the days of your past glory and herald the birth of the Dawn we all sigh for. It was the Kur-ān that was the source of our strength and advancement, the fountain-head from which flowed the stream of Islamic culture and civilisation. Take the Kur-ān once more as your guide. It is as intact, as unchanged, as ever it was, and it is the foundation upon which the same splendid superstructure can be built once more."

As Mr. Davenport expresses it, "The Koran is the general code of the Moslem world; a social, civil, commercial, military, judicial, criminal, penal and yet religious code: by it everything is regulated, from the ceremonies of religion to those of daily life; from the salvation of the soul to the health of the body; from the rights of the general community to those of society; from morality to crime, from punishment here to that of the life to come."

The testimony of Chambers' Encyclopædie may also be quoted: "That part of Islām which distinctly reveals the mind of its author is also its most com-

“plete and its most shining part — we mean the ethics of the Koran. They are not found, any more than the other laws, brought together in one or two or three Surats, but like golden threads they are woven into the huge fabric of the religious constitution of Mohammed. Injustice, falsehood, pride, revengefulness, calumny, mockery, avarice, prodigality, debauchery, mistrust and suspicion are inveighed against as ungodly and wicked, while benevolence, liberality, modesty, forbearance, patience, endurance, frugality, sincerity, straight-forwardness, decency, love of peace and truth and above all, trust in one God and submitting to His will, are considered as the pillars of true piety and the principal signs of a true believer.”

But the creation and organisation of an empire, a feat performed by many besides Muḥammad, is not the aspect of his work which appeals most to Muslims, albeit the constitution he gave Arabia was excellent and the nation he founded was a model of unity and energy: what makes him so dear to our hearts is the manner in which he fulfilled his mission as a prophet, ennobling the people of Arabia and bringing about a truly marvellous change in their aspirations, conduct and character. Gauged by the spiritual standard rather than by that of mere territorial conquest, the progress of the Arabs during the hundred years extolled by Carlyle was as nothing to that which they made during the ten when Muḥammad was at their head.

The key to the incredible change that took place in them may be found in the Kur-ān, from which I give a few quotations in an appendix, premising

that the translation cannot do justice to the beauties of the original.

Muhammad's share in the progress of the world.

It was the Prophet who laid the foundation stone of that vast edifice of enlightenment and civilisation which has adorned the world since his time. The Muslims were commanded by the Kur-an to say "Oh God increase my knowledge" and heard Muhammad tell them "knowledge is the birthright of the Faithful; they take it wherever they find it." Such were the seeds which grew into trees whose branches spread to Bagdad, Sicily, Egypt and Spain, and whose fruits are enjoyed to this day by modern Europe. "We cannot consider in this place", says Chambers' Encyclopædia, "what Islām has done for the cause of all humanity, or, more exactly, what is its precise share in the development of science and art in Europe. Broadly, speaking, the Mohammedans may be said to have been the enlightened teachers of barbarous Europe, from the ninth to the thirteenth century Arabic philosophy, medicine, natural history, geography, history, grammar, rhetoric, and the 'golden art of poetry', schooled by the old Hellenic masters, brought forth an abundant harvest of works, many of which will live and teach as long as there will be generations to be taught."

Renan adds: "The taste for science and literature had, by the tenth century, established, in this privileged corner of the world, a toleration of which modern times hardly offer us an example. Christians,

"Jews and Mussulmans, spoke the same tongue, sang the same songs, participated in the same literary and scientific studies. All the barriers which separated the various peoples were effaced; all worked with one accord in the work of a common civilisation. The mosques of Cordova, where the students could be counted by thousands, became the active centres of philosophical and scientific studies."

Deutsch thus describes the work of the Saracens: "To hold up the light to Humanity they alone, while darkness lay around; to raise up the wisdom and knowledge of Hellas from the dead; to teach philosophy, medicine, astronomy, and the golden art of song to the West as well as to the East; to stand at the cradle of modern science, and to cause us late epigoni to weep over the day when Grenada fell."

Draper has shown what a prominent share the Muslims took in freeing Europe from the shackles of bigotry and leading her to the "age of reason"; and a host of other authorities might be quoted in proof of the debt which she owes to Islām.

It is necessary to recollect, too, that the achievements of its followers must, in the end, be traced back to Muḥammad, whose deep devotion to knowledge connects him with that of the present day. "Four things", he would say, "support the world: the learning of the wise, the justice of the great, the prayers of the good and the valour of the brave."

Conclusion.

I add a few quotations regarding the place of Muḥammad in history. Mr. Freeman holds that

"Surely a good and sincere man, full of confidence in his Creator, who works an immense reform, both in faith and practice, is truly a direct instrument in the hands of God, and may be said to have a commission from Him." Mr. Stobart bears grudging testimony that "judged by the smallness of the means at his disposal, and the extent and perseverance of the work he accomplished, no name in the world's history shines with a more specious lustre than that of the prophet of Mecca . . . judged by the standard of human renown, the glory of what mortal can compare with his?" Weil, too, is forced to admit that Muḥammad must be considered in some sort commissioned by God, and so is Mr. Bosworth Smith, who says elsewhere: "By a fortune absolutely unique in history, Muḥammad is a three-fold founder — of a nation, of an empire and of a religion. Illiterate himself, scarcely able to read and write, he was yet the author of a book which is a poem, a code of laws, a Book of Common Prayer and a "Bible" in one, and is revered to this day by a sixth of the whole human race as a miracle of purity of style, of wisdom and of truth. It is the one miracle claimed by Mohammed — his 'standing miracle' he called it — and a miracle indeed it is."

Has any other man, I ask in conclusion, brought about such a glorious revolution in the religion, morality, social customs, aspirations and natural inclinations of a people, and raised them from the most abject barbarism to the pinnacle of noble thought and action: can any other claim the same versatile genius, which influenced the world in so many ways? Form, if you will, a group containing

the elements of which he was made up: take an eminent prophet, legislator, commander, statesman, poet and philosopher, but even then the combination will fall short of this one extraordinary man. And, above all, where can another be found whose every act, down to the most ordinary, has been so minutely chronicled and investigated, yet who has endeared himself so greatly to his fellows? Not only have his precepts and actions been the guiding-star through life, for thirteen centuries, of generation after generation, as they are still at this moment to one-fifth of the whole human race, but the heart of every one of his countless followers glows with an ardent and sincere filial love for that unique man, the Last Prophet, whom they delight to honour with such titles as "The Best of Men" and "The Mercy of the World".

Oh God, bless Muḥammad, his descendents, his companions and his followers!

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